

## Farmers gain from satellite link

-- They obtain weather information, which helps them to plan their planting  
By Simon Esaku

John Bosco Owino, 37, along with a dozen other peasants, scrambles to read a print-out of the quarterly weather forecast pinned on the mud wall of a shop in Pabone B village in Iyolwa Sub-county in Tororo District.

“The quarterly weather forecast helps us know what crops to plant and when,” says Bosco, adding, “In the past we used to rely on rain makers, who conned us.”

Weather information is printed out at the World Vision office of Iyolwa Area Development Project, three kilometres from Bosco’s village. Peter Walyaula, a community development facilitator at the project office, prints out the information from his computer.

Peter receives climate and weather information using one of the latest communication technologies. Using a satellite antenna, a digital radio receiver picks signals from the satellite Afrisat, stationed over Gabon in West Africa. The satellite, launched by World Space Corporation of USA on October 28, 1998, covers Africa, the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin.



*developmental tool:  
The Hitachi satellite radio*

From the Hitachi digital radio, manufactured under license for WorldSpace Corporation by Hitachi Limited of Japan, the signals pass onto a modem. The modem translates the signals into data which a computer can recognise.

Apart from the climate and weather information, we also give the farmers information on agriculture and animal husbandry, environment, appropriate technology, recycling, food processing, energy, business, micro-enterprise, crafts, health, HIV/AIDS, water and sanitation and building and construction,” says Peter.

“I learned many things, such as making compost manure and how to rear rabbits,” says Bosco. Information from ALC is prepared by different experts and institutions the world over.

Peter explains: “I pass some of the information to other stakeholders, including agricultural extension workers, the local chiefs and Rock FM in Tororo.”

Besides data, the Hitachi digital radio, costing about \$150 (sh 265,000), like other radios, receives broadcasts on FM, MW and SW, but unlike other radios, picks some 80 radio stations that have signed up with WorldSpace directly from Afrisat using its satellite antenna. These stations, with clear digital sound, include DNN and BBC.

The ALC broadcasts some of its information as radio programmes. President Yoweri Museveni’s speeches on AIDS prevention in Uganda are regularly aired on the channel. The UN Secretary General, Kofi Anan, also speaks

on African leadership and AIDs on ALC.

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ACMAD sends out the weather and development information under a project called RANET (Radio and Internet) project, conceived in Niger in 1997. World Vision, along side the Meteorology Department of the Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment, are implementing the RANET project in Tororo, Soroti, Gulu, Arua, Kabale, Hoima, Nakasongola, Rakai and Mukono, where World Vision has projects. ACMAD provided ten digital radios.

“The Meteorology Department prepares the climate and weather information and uploads it to Afrisat,” says Milton Waiswa, who is in charge of RANET activities at the Meteorology Department. Fred Wajje, World Vision’s Agrometeorologist overseeing RANET operations, says there are plans to launch three community FM stations.

“RANET is an appropriate technology because we work in poor rural areas where people can’t have access to information in such fields such as agriculture, education, health and weather,” says Robby Muhumuza, National Director of World Vision Uganda.

RANET has extended to Chad Senegal, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and Mozambique. It receives support from organisations including USID, UNDP, The World Bank, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), World Space Foundation, The Freeplay Foundation and the University of Oklahoma.

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